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THE PROFESSIONALLY TRAINED HIGH-SCHOOL PRINCIPAL¹

THOMAS H. BRIGGS
Teachers College, Columbia University

It is axiomatic that to the largest extent a principal determines the character of a school. If he has a clearly defined program which he has convincingly developed with the teachers, if he consistently works with them to make this program a reality in practice, the school is a unity, an organization effective for securing definite results. If, on the other hand, the principal is uncertain of his goal, arbitrary in his routine administration, and narrow in his conception of his duties, the school is a heterogeneous collection of teachers, each attempting more or less what seems good in his own sight. No generalization is more true than this: as the principal, so the school.

Formerly, as the name implies, the principal was a head teacher, taking care of the details of administration in his odd moments. But as our high schools have increased in importance and size, the principal is today the executive in charge of a no mean institution; in many instances he is supported by one or more assistants and by a corps of heads of departments. These heads of departments and the teachers are all highly trained, speaking relatively, and the human raw material with which they work is the most precious that the community has. The principal, then, has become one of the most important public servants, and as such has responsibilities that make his selection a grave duty of the superintendent and of the board of education.

No head of a comparable commercial or industrial plant would be considered for a moment unless he were technically trained for his position or unless he had manifested superior fitness through experience in similar positions. No teacher is selected today in our better schools unless he is professionally trained or manifestly

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successful in experience. Not even a kindergartner is considered unless she has technical and professional training for her specific work. But, as a rule, there is no such requirement for the principal, the most important influence in the most important element of the great public investment of education.

What are the sources of our high-school principals? In the smallest schools they are simply trained teachers. In the larger schools they are usually promoted on the basis of their "experience" in the smaller schools, the demands of which are so different as to make this experience of little worth, or else they are promoted from the corps because of successful teaching or personality. It is profitable, of course, for a principal to have performed administrative duties, and it is almost essential for him to have been a successful teacher and to have a good personality; but in the great majority of instances the newly elected principal today is prepared for his work to no such adequate degree as are similar administrators in other lines of work.

The results are that traditions, often of very limited effectiveness, are perpetuated; practices that seemed good in the small school are brought up to the larger, not infrequently without the maximum of success; and in most cases the principal learns his job at the expense of the pupils, the teachers, and the public which is paying the full salary of a man supposedly trained.

There are obvious limitations to this method of preparation. Only the ablest and most inventive can through personal experience develop beyond a narrow limit. Even they would profit and progress faster with a sound basis of theory and with a broad knowledge of what has proved effective in similar schools in the United States and abroad. Such men as manifest success as high-school principals are constantly being drawn off to positions as superintendents, where again they learn their duties with full pay. We have happily passed beyond the day when a teacher begins in the first grade and is successively promoted grade by grade up into the high school. We must now get away from the equally mischievous practice of promotion from teacher to principal and from principal to superintendent. What is needed is a body of men and women professionally trained as high-school principals and school

boards educated to demand such training and to reward it so that the successful may afford to remain in the work for which they have proved their competence.

To the credit of high-school principals it must be said that many have exerted themselves mightily to grow. By visits to other schools, by associations such as this, and by study in summer schools hundreds are annually adding to their powers. But there are fifteen thousand high-school principals in the United States.

Of these fifteen thousand high-school principals, the majority spend a considerable part of their time in duties that are not those of a professional principal. In Missouri, exclusive of St. Louis and Kansas City, only 6 per cent of the principals teach one period a day or none; 61 per cent teach five periods or more. In the first-class high schools of West Virginia the median number of teaching periods a day for the principals is 3.2. It probably is wise for every principal, even in the largest school, to teach one class so that he may keep in close touch with one phase of the school, but it is obvious that when teaching he is not in the best sense of the word a principal.

The facts for Missouri and West Virginia are more or less true for other states. The amount of teaching done by principals would in most cases, even when finances are limited, be considerably reduced if the principal could show the board of education a convincing professional program of how he proposes to use his time for the improvement of the school. Board members are usually practical enough to see that it is uneconomical to require the highest paid employee to teach when, if freed from this duty, he can make five or fifteen mediocre teachers into good ones, improve the educational plans of the school, and direct the social life of the pupils so that they are prepared more effectively to take their places in the community.

A principal is removed from his professional work to a part-time teaching position usually by the demands of higher authorities; he removes himself from his professional opportunities by assuming duties that can be as well performed by others. Every visitor of high schools has seen numerous instances of principals who fritter away their time in doing routine work that properly belongs to a

clerk, a janitor, a teacher, a pupil, or that may as well be left undone. One principal of a large high school runs the bookroom; another hands out supplies; a third unnecessarily sits as guard over a small study hall. These and other similar duties should not be performed by the highest paid officer of the school. They will not be performed long by the professional principal, for he will convince the board of education of the economy of employing a low salaried clerk to free him for larger activities; he will delegate the duties to teachers or pupils, who usually are willing, frequently are glad, to assume such work with its minor responsibility; or he will organize and develop his school so that some of the matters take care of

TABLE I
MINIMUM, MEDIAN, AND MAXIMUM PERCENTAGE OF TIME
DEVOTED BY SEVENTEEN PRINCIPALS TO VARIOUS DUTIES
DURING THE MONTH OF APRIL, 1922

	Minimum	Median	Maximum
Teaching.....	0.0	19.1	53.8
Routine office work.....	11.9	37.8	63.2
Interviews.....	1.9	15.1	50.0
Observing teaching.....	0.0	7.2	35.2
Criticizing teachers.....	0.0	2.3	28.3

themselves. Much time can be saved for professional duties by more economical organization, by turning off work promptly, by the persistent *will* to devote one's self to the larger things of which one is capable.

How principals actually spend their time is determined somewhat by the exigencies of the season and by fortuitous happenings. It is interesting, however, to consider Table I which shows the distribution of the time of seventeen principals in eight different states during the month of April, 1922. These principals had under them from nine to sixty-five teachers; they devoted from 5.4 to 9.7 hours a day to their own work. A study of the table shows at once that there are extravagancies in some details and parsimony in others—a variation that hardly seems possible if these seventeen men had a common professional ideal of their duties and a professional program for accomplishment.

The primary responsibility of a principal is leadership. An executive is successful not for what he does but for what he gets others to do. The principal of a high school should study to ascertain the peculiar activities in which each teacher is strong and focus his attention on these until they have obtained their maximum growth. Thus he not only secures the greatest possible positive contribution to the work of the school but also goes far toward developing an *esprit de corps*.

The principal should also, after ascertaining the individual faculties of his staff, delegate to each one some responsibility, large or small, for which he is peculiarly competent. This sentence means precisely what it says: the principal should delegate not only the duty but also the responsibility. It is the teacher's opportunity to exercise initiative, to organize, to fail or succeed. Whatever happens, the teacher grows and because of the experience is ready for some larger task. After this delegation the principal should stimulate, advise, and encourage; and when success is accomplished, recognize it and give public credit to the one deserving it. Many administrators are jealous of the successful accomplishment of their subordinates and short-sightedly attempt to withhold credit or to secure it for themselves. Even such selfish injustice should recognize that in the long run the public thinks of the school as a whole and of the principal as the one ultimately responsible for what is good or what is bad. Really successful administration is found when each individual in the corps is enthusiastically doing the tasks that he is most able to do well.

The duties of the principal fall into three major classes: administration, the direction of the social life of the school, and the improvement of instruction. The duties of administration are definite, concrete, and imperious. Because of this it is easy for a principal to fall into the habit of giving them first attention and even of making them a fetish. But the professional principal soon recognizes that a school is administered only that it may be instructed, that his systems and his routines have no value unless they decrease the friction and facilitate the work of the teachers. The professionally minded principal also recognizes that most of the

administrative duties, which others jealously reserve for themselves, can quite as well or better be performed by a clerk or by delegated teachers, and he perfects his organization so as to free himself for more important responsibilities. The sure sign of inefficiency is a high-school principal continuously busied with routine details.

The second class of duties, pertaining to the direction of the social life of the school, has become of major importance with the recognition that both abroad and at home a large part of the secondary education of youth is outside the classroom. In the great British public schools boys learn much of academic subjects, but they learn more that makes them potent in European affairs and in their intimate social life from the unwritten but no less real traditions of the school. To an extent the same is true in other foreign schools, especially in the lycée of France. Until recently we were influenced by the curricula of these older institutions and to a large extent ignored the other equally important factor of education. Of course, conditions are different in our schools, but while we concentrated on the teaching of subject-matter, with incidental and often fortuitous personal influences, the pupils developed their own plans for social life. When they became highly organized and interfered with formal instruction, we became officially cognizant of them; and, influenced by the recent emphasis on social education, we now perceive in these extra-curricula activities of the boys and girls an opportunity for another real phase of education.

It is probable that there is in most schools some teacher more competent to direct details of the social life of the school than is the principal. In many schools teachers trained and experienced in this work are employed especially for it. The professional principal recognizes the importance of the extra-curricula life as truly educative; he relates it to his fundamental philosophy; he delegates its direction to one or more especially competent teachers, and he encourages its development as he does that of the department of history or science or fine arts. Much has been accomplished in this new field for public education during the past decade, and the possibilities are limitless, but a principal needs professional training for its direction so that he may economically learn what has been attempted and winnow the good from the trivial or merely

spectacular. In a field so recently cultivated it is inevitable that some mistakes have been and will be made by short-sighted enthusiasts. Here the professional principal finds an opportunity to direct the natural tendencies of youth for social relations and activities so that they may most profitably make returns on the public investment of education.

The last of the major duties of the professional principal concerns the improvement of the subject-matter taught and the teaching. In these matters, whatever else it may have or lack, a school achieves its modicum of success. One would suppose, therefore, that all principals give the major part of their time, attention, and effort to the improvement of instruction. But this is far from true. In fact, it is unusual to find principals who give the matter, either directly or indirectly, any considerable amount of attention. By their own statements, which probably do not err in being undergenerous, one period a day or less is given to supervision of instruction by 52 per cent of the principals of first-class high schools in West Virginia, by 65 per cent in Kentucky, by 76 per cent in Virginia, and by 89 per cent in Missouri, St. Louis and Kansas City being excepted.

The reasons for the neglect of this most important field are several. The one most commonly given is lack of time. But that is not the real reason. As previously stated, a professionally trained principal learns how to organize his school, to delegate duties, and to present to the board of education a convincing program likely to secure time necessary for what he believes to be essential. Even when average principals have time at their disposal, they do not ordinarily spend it in the supervision of instruction. In one large city high school there are two assistant principals and five clerks. Set forth neatly in an organization book are the duties of each one—corridor patrol, control of the keys, lunchroom finance, signing excuse blanks, and the like, but not one item pertains to the improvement of subject-matter or of instruction. This situation is extreme and exceptional in that the principal has adequate assistance; it is not untypical in that he has organized the school so as to care for the easy, concrete, objective details and neglect the difficult and more or less intangible matters for which the school exists.

The real reasons for the neglect of attention to the improvement of instruction is that many principals tacitly recognize their incompetence to perform the duties satisfactorily. Inasmuch as most high-school teachers have some training and all but a few are experienced, no superficial inspection can be satisfactory; no arbitrary criticisms and dogmatic directions can long pass for success. Poor teachers may be made good and good teachers made better by regular supervision, even though it consists only of suggestions of helpful detail and keeps each teacher consistently doing his best to secure the approbation of the supervisor; but the demand, the insistent need, is for a leader who will work out with the staff in teachers' meetings, in committees, and in personal conferences clearly stated and convincing statements of purpose, for each subject as well as for the school as a whole, and then follow, day in and day out, with observation, learning, suggestion, encouragement, and recognition. This is the sort of supervision that is needed, the sort that is not likely to be given unless the principal is professionally trained for this work.

Both as a science and as an art, supervision demands preparatory training. It must be based on a clear conception of the purposes of education, so defined as not merely to give mental satisfaction but also to demand and direct action. Practical training is often criticized today by those who believe in "a broad cultural education," holding that each one should "earn the means first—God surely will contrive use for our earning." We believe in "a broad cultural background," and we in the professional schools deal chiefly with those who have sought it, with varying degrees of success, in their undergraduate days. Whatever their achievement there, they need now a pragmatic gospel—a gospel that begins with a vision of what should be done and ends with the realization of doing it. The fundamental demand in professional training is an understanding of the purposes of education in a democracy and of the secondary school as one of its important agencies.

Effective supervision must be based, too, on a knowledge of the practices that have proved good in foreign schools as well as in our own. Only the most sublime genius can expect to discover by his unaided efforts practices better than all of the rest of mankind

have discovered. Those who are not sublime geniuses must seek in their professional training to know, to observe, and to evaluate the best practices of others, and to translate them into such form that they are adapted to new situations. Personal visiting is helpful in this matter, of course, provided it is spent in continuous observation of skilled teachers and a concentration on their virtues rather than on their shortcomings; but surely directed observation and evaluating discussion with others of cumulative experience and similar interests will prove more economical for those who seek professional training.

This observation can be most valuable only when it is subsequent to a knowledge of sound learning and teaching processes. Psychology has so advanced in the past generation, especially the psychology of education, that it must be known by the professional principal—not merely known as a science but translated into theses that will make teaching skilled and economical. To learn abstract science is relatively easy; to apply it to effective activities of the schoolroom is difficult. Every suggestion from the practices of skilled teachers and from experienced supervisors tends to add to the potency of a student preparing himself to improve the skill of teachers who may be under his direction.

Finally, after purposes are clearly conceived, science is learned, and directed observations are made, a student needs practice under supervision. Pure theory is beautiful to contemplate; it has often been considered adequate on examinations. But any professional school that offers it without concomitant opportunities for guided practice contradicts and weakens its own teaching. Law schools have their moot courts; medical schools, their laboratories and hospital service; and schools of education, which concern the very matter of effective learning, must no less afford in their professional training opportunities for applying in practice what has been learned in theory. Beyond that, ideally the student should be personally followed into his first real position and afforded generous help. That being usually impossible, professional schools of education do the next best thing and give considerable assistance to their alumni through correspondence and conferences at frequent meetings. Through these same means the professional schools are con-

stantly accreting their own knowledge by ascertaining the successful practices of their alumni.

It has been declared, sometimes stridently, that "principals are born and not made." So are horses. But I have never heard a stock breeder argue that training cannot improve a horse, whatever his breeding. It is quite true, of course, that some men are endowed with native powers of leadership and that some acquire in their social training a degree of tact that enables them to work with others deftly and with a minimum of friction; but these qualities alone will not make a successful principal, professionally considered. The more the native endowment of a man who aspires to leadership in education, the more he is capable of profiting from professional training of the right kind.

As said before, the demand by principals actively at work for professional training has been their acknowledgment of its need and their recognition of its worth. The sacrifices that have sent hundreds to summer schools are the evidences of a professional ambition as commendable as it is superlatively fine. Even more is demanded of those who have faith in themselves and the aspiration to qualify for leadership where it is urgently needed—not merely summer work but study through the academic year when more effective training can be had, especially in directed field work.

Everyone agrees that in a period of change opportunities are greatest to make one's contribution, to influence largely the shaping of practices that are yet not indurated into habits. And everyone recognizes that secondary education in the United States is today growing and changing as no other phase of education ever has before in the history of the world. It is unique that we can recognize the opportunity while it is still here. The demand for leaders is unprecedented—a demand not merely for men who can "keep the school running without friction," but rather for those who have a vision, who have knowledge, who have skill, who have the power, and above all consistent courage in the face of whatever obstacles may be to translate all of these into a program that works. The situation is a challenge to everyone who aspires to make a contribution to the advance of mankind. The contribution is in large measure dependent on the professional preparation for it.